Disgust by TheSeelieCourtJester

Series: Obsessions [9]
Category: Danny Phantom
Genre: Adopted Danielle "Dani" Fenton, Alternate Timelines, Blood, Blood and Gore, Blood and Violence, Dead Dove: Do Not Eat, Demons, Dysfunctional Family, Family Drama, Ghost King Vlad Masters, Implied/Referenced Sexual Assault, M/M, Murder Family, Paganism, Psychological Horror, Teenage Rebellion, Witch Danny, Witchcraft
Characters: Clockwork (Danny Phantom), Danielle "Dani" Phantom, Danny Fenton, Fright Knight (Danny Phantom), Jack Fenton, Jazz Fenton, Maddie Fenton, Original Fenton Character(s) (Danny Phantom), Paulina Sanchez, Vlad Masters
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2022-07-13
Updated: 2022-08-08
Packaged: 2022-12-16 09:54:32
Rating: Not Rated
Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
Chapters: 3
Words: 8,096
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Story URL: https://archiveofourown.org/works/40276959
Author URL: https://archiveofourown.org/users/TheSeelieCourtJester/pseuds/TheSeelieCourtJester
Summary:

Mallory Masters is in a corner. It's all she could do to stave off killing herself while she tosses her rich, spoiled life in dumpster fires she keeps sneaking off to light. It's not that she wants to. She just has trouble dealing with issues. Specifically, emotions she desperately wants to control but can't. When Mallory loses everything at the hands of a murderous gang, she runs away. To where she doesn't know. But she's running.

Daniel Masters is also in a corner. Although he is now Head of the Essex and consort to the Ghost King, things are more precarious than

ever. One wrong move could spell the end for himself and his family. Out of desperation, he decides to visit his Aunt Alicia to learn more about the coven and (hopefully) find a way out of damnation.

One day, he meets an out of control witch who needs help controlling her powers. Out of pity, he takes her in, only to realize that the past never dies, and that both he and his new charge are running out of time to save themselves and their loved ones.

Relationships: Danny Fenton & Danielle "Dani" Phantom, Danny Fenton & Vlad Masters, Danny Fenton/Vlad Masters, Jack Fenton/ Maddie Fenton
Series: Obsessions [9]
Series URL: https://archiveofourown.org/series/2387209
Comments: 6
Kudos: 8

Chapter 1

Author's Note:

> Still procrastinating but getting better. I'm so excited to tell you guys that I'll be volunteering for planned parenthood! I'm also scheduled to take my NCE, so which me luck.
>
> I do not own Danny Phantom!!

They were waiting for him in that castle.

He gazed evenly at the cathedral-like doors in front of him. He could hear the howling and laughter, the doubt and ignorance. He could imagine the entire court now taking bets on whether or not he'd be able to demonstrate the loyalty they were so desperate to see, happily willing to burn everything he loved alive if he failed at this simple task. Even though His Majesty was inside, ready to quell the rising rebellion, he couldn't help but worry, just for a little. But he closed his eyes, and he took a deep breath. He straightened, then opened the door.

The silence was deafening. The moment he walked through the doorway, all eyes were on him. Their cheers turned solemn, blissfully arrogant smiles frowned, or scowled, or grimaced with fear. The nobles carefully postured, bowing their heads respectfully. Even the Observants couldn't avoid him, and quieted their clear rage. He succeeded. There's no question.

Danny schooled his features, displaying a level of indifference he was anything but. He ignored the bloody trails that followed after him, or the headless corpse that he dragged in with one hand, which he later threw at the executioner. He dared not look back at the King's Court. He couldn't let them know about his nervousness. One false move; he had to remember that.

He stopped, just a few inches away from the steps that led to Vlad's throne. He held the halfa's dark, crimson eyes, then forced himself to smirk. "There," he said softly. "I just did your executioner's job for

you."

Danielle closed her eyes, put a hand on her mouth. She couldn't do stuff like that here, but he could understand. It took a while, but she needed to see that they weren't heroes. This was the price for peace, and she had to be okay with that. Vlad knew it too, and allowed Danielle to hide herself behind his throne.

A bored look masked his discomfort, as he shifted in his seat. "Very good, he answered, as he stared down at his disapproving court. "Is there anything else? After all, the consort did you all justice. The very least you could do is prostrate yourselves."

The giants from the Far Frozen appeared amused, as did the Fire Salamanders. The Air Elementals crowded around Dani, while the Observants stood there, solemn. The rest of the court appeared at a loss for words. Even Nathaniel, who stood beside the now former executioner, seemed surprised. That Danny could follow Vlad's command was one thing, but to have their trust flaunted in front of them was something else entirely. Danny dug his fingernails into his skin as he did. What was Vlad doing?

"Leave us," Vlad's voice boomed. "I wish to speak with my consort. *Alone."*

At the mention, Dani's jaw dropped. Danny's eye twitched, silently begging for her not to fight. For a split second he could feel Vlad's tension too. But then she, alongside the rest of the nobles, bowed curtly. She was slow to leave, that much was certain. Danny watched as they all filed neatly out of the throne room, leaving the two halfas by their lonesome.

Danny breathed a heavy sigh, his shoulders sagging. "We did it."

"There'll be another," Vlad said, his soothing tone a balm to Danny's nerves. "And another. And another. This was the fifth time you've had to prove yourself."

"Are you afraid?" Danny asked. "You shouldn't be. Even if one succeeds it'll take centuries before anyone comes within a fraction of your power."

“From those incompetent fools, no.”

Danny blinked. He dared take a step towards the throne, and when Vlad didn’t reprimand him, he took it as a sign that they were truly alone. He took another step, and then another, before he was finally in front of the man. He laid a hand against Vlad’s cheek. “Dani’s young,” he whispered. “And she’s learning. Besides, I bet they’re more likely to accept her better than us.”

“Still, I feel every time we take her to court we’re willingly offering her as a hostage.”

Danny stiffened. Even though Vlad trusted Nathaniel to not let anything happen to her, he was uneasy. His hand fell to his side. He wasn’t sure if he conveyed any reassurance in that touch. Fuck, *he* wasn’t even sure who his allies were, aside from the Far Frozen and of course, Dorathea.

And he didn’t miss their eyes either. He’s heard the rumors. Heard the curiosities surrounding Danielle and her powers. He was more than sure she wasn’t a witch; he’s gone through the spells, and he’s triple checked her core. There was absolutely no way.

A little girl came to mind, but he shoved the thought down.

Before Vlad could say anything, Danny moved away. He gave the King a shallow smile, as he moved away from the throne. “I’ve got a meeting with the coven,” he stated. “Please be there before midnight. We’ve got a lot to discuss.”

“I’m sure.”

Stiffly, Danny nodded, before turning intangible, and flying through the roof.

She creaked the door open. She peered through, ignoring the scent of cigarette smoke and ash wafting off her. She shifted her eyes to and from, before pushing the door a little further and crept inside. She shut the door softly, then spun around, a satisfied grin on her face. She checked her watch. About 2 ’o clock in the morning. A little earlier than expected, and

judging from the driveway, Dad was still out. She pulled her backpack on her shoulders, and walked towards the grand staircase.

"Mallory."

She jolted. But surprise was quickly replaced by irritation. She followed the sound of the voice, and found Danny sitting on their black leather couch, cross-legged, looking mad as fuck. The fact he wasn't even there *before, angered her even more. She scowled. She opened her mouth, but he beat her to it.*

"It's…2:05 in the morning. Where've you been?"

She flinched. She hated that righteous, indignant tone. The tone that said he was better than her. She tightened her grip on her backpack. "Noneya," she answered.

He narrowed his eyes. "Mallory-"

"Why the fuck are you *still awake anyways? Don't you have to meet with the other gold diggers?"*

Danny stood. He walked over toward her, a calm look in his face, an unreadable light in his eyes. He was wearing ragged blue jeans, a dark, v-neck t-shirt. His scruffy hair fell across piercing blue orbs, so much so even Mallory could see the guilty look on her face. He finally stopped, just a mere inches away from her. There were dark circles underneath his eyes. Meaning he'd been awake this entire time. She fought down her nerves.

It wasn't a second later before he said, "I can smell the weed off you."

"…Fuck off," she muttered defensively.

His eye twitched. Before she realized it, he grabbed her backpack and dropped it to the floor. She didn't have time to protest, and by the time she found her voice, she suddenly found herself staring at a bunch of dirty needles and ziplock bags. Danny grabbed one back, and angrily looked up at her. "What's this? What-?!"

"I said fuck off!" She screamed. She tried bolting past him, but Danny grabbed her upper arm. "Mallory," *he hissed, "what the* hell *is this? Are you…are you* using again?!"

She started scratching his knuckles.

"Answer me," *he said furiously.*

"No!"

"You're not?!"

"That's not mine!"

"Then why the fuck *do you smell like weed and alcohol?! And…and is that Everclear?!"*

She kept fighting.

"What would your Dad think?! What about Danielle?!"

She paused. She could feel some resemblance of shame come across her, the guilt. But then she started fighting again. No. Fuck no. *She refused to be judged by some…some* twink *who can't even hold down a job. He's only a few years older than her! Fuck him!*

"Get off me!" she screeched.

"Not until you've told me where you've been. Is this Ben's?! Or Steven's?!"

She reeled her hand back, and slapped him.

It had no effect on him. Of course it didn't. But it shocked him enough, gave her enough time to slip away. She didn't think about grabbing her backpack. She just had to get away. She just…she couldn't deal with this tonight.

She could feel the air conditioned breeze whizzing past her. Her messy brown hair followed after her, as she rounded the corner and ran inside her room. She slammed her bedroom door shut. She stared at it, holding her hands to her chest, eyes wide, chest heaving. She's never done this before. She's always hated Danny. But she's never…she's never…

But then she saw a familiar shadow from behind the door. Instinctively she knew. She bit the inside of her cheek. She held a shuddered breath. Apologies ran through her head, alongside screaming matches, some of

which had occurred, others hadn't.

And then he was behind her door.

She could practically see it. She could see him raising his fists, knocking the door. Mouth open, ready to call her name for the umpteenth time today. They already got into it this morning; why not go for round two?

But then she heard a sigh. She heard a rustle, then footsteps. Mallory watched the shadow leave, felt his presence disappearing from behind the door. It took a while before she was able to feel herself. She tried moving toward the door, that familiar guilt coursing through her. But then she fell back on her oversized bed, the pink covers lightly bouncing beside her. She covered her eyes, and mirrored Danny's sigh.

She heard her phone buzzing. Wearily, she dug the device from her pockets, and opened the screen. Ben.

Did you bring the stuff?

We still meeting tomorrow?

Pick up Angel.

Fucking bitch.

She closed the phone and tossed it to the floor. She closed her eyes, as she curled into a small ball on top of the bed. She didn't blame Danny for giving up.

She was disappointed in herself too.

Chapter 2

Mallory woke to a rather sweet aroma. With bacon and eggs and cinnamon. And rum.

So much fucking rum.

She groaned. Carefully, she sat up, trying to steady herself. She rubbed her temples, and winced at the pounding. She felt nauseous. She couldn't go to school like this. And she had that test to…

Study for.

Shit, Danny's gonna kill her.

She forced herself up, despite every cell in her body screeching at her for doing so. She grabbed the edge of her bed and pulled herself off the fluffy covers. She rubbed her eyes wearily, all the while staring at the empty space in front of her. C'mon, he's waiting downstairs. He's gonna have questions. Lots of them. She's always been a pretty good actor, and she can lie when she needed to. Dad believed them. Danielle did too, though she was starting to doubt whether or not she could keep up the facade. She's always been smart, so smart she sometimes wondered if she had eyes in the back of her head.

Mallory went into the bathroom and tied her hair up. Then she took a good, hard look at herself, before removing the hair band, her greasy brown hair cascading down her bruised, grimy face. She grabbed a washcloth and poured scorching water on it. She scrubbed her cheeks and nose and lips furiously, trying to remove the grime and the dirt and, somehow, the bruises. That didn't work of course.

She scowled at herself then. She opened the medicine cabinet and pulled out some balm Danny made the other day. It killed her to use it now, but, as much as she hated to admit it, it had its uses. She smeared some of it on a bandage and brought it up to the ugly bruises beneath her left eye. She was lucky he hadn't busted her lip; that would've been harder to explain away.

She combed her fingers through her hair, grimacing at the tangled,

then put on deodorant. She changed tank tops, and sprayed herself with as much perfume as she could. She screwed the cap on and shoved it back into the cabinet. She rushed downstairs, the smells once again bombarding her.

Much to her chagrin, she caught Danny standing over the stove. He was reading something, his eyebrows furrowed. She froze for a split second, a deer in the headlights, before she pushed herself forward. She was about to head for the door, when she heard a sigh. “Aren’t you gonna eat?”

Irritation bubbled up inside. She fought down a groan. “I’m gonna be late.”

“It’s 7.”

“…The bus-“

“I’ll take you. I need to talk with you anyways.”

Mallory looked back down at the doorknob. It was her only escape. She could just make a run for it. And as long as she’s in first period, it’s not like Danny could complain. But then there’s Dad, and he’s always taken Danny’s side. It was so annoying.

“Mallory.”

Not bothering to hide her distaste, Mallory shoved her hands in her pockets and trudged into the kitchen. She glared daggers at Danny, who was still reading. A second later, he looked at her, then down at the countertop. She followed his eyes. As per usual, eggs and bacon. Some pancakes too.

Despite her stomach’s pleas, she folded her arms across her chest. “Not hungry,” she muttered.

“Did I ask?”

Her eye twitched, just as Danny shut the book. “Besides,” he continued, “I’m not gonna have you telling your dad I don’t feed you.”

“You don’t.”

“Says the leftovers.” Danny grabbed a small, black mug and pushed it over to her. “If you’re not gonna eat, at least drink this. You’re hungover aren’t you?”

Mallory flinched. “I-“

“Save it. I can smell it off you.” He leaned against the counter. “Your backpack’s on the sofa if you’re wondering.”

Mallory froze, last night racing back towards her. She cupped the mug, ashamed. Danny must’ve noticed, because at that moment he turned away. “I don’t understand why you’d hide that. You’re a really good artist.”

She took a sip. She blinked. Kudzu. He’ll probably make her drink this the rest of the day. There’s a pink thermos with her name on it. She smirked emptily. “Second place,” she said.

“That’s nothing to sneeze at. You were published too.”

“You do realize what the painting was about, right?”

At that moment Danny fell silent. In some ways, Mallory was proud she was right. In others, it devastated her, causing the rift between them both to grow even wider. She twisted her fingers anxiously in front of her. For a brief moment, she regretted painting the damn symbol, for giving into the craving.

Finally, Danny spoke. “I do, and while I don’t like it, I’m still proud of you.”

She scoffed. “You’re just saying that cause of Dad.”

“No, I’m saying it because that’s how I feel.”

Again, they fell into an award quiet. She could feel Danny examining her, from the cuts and bruises on her face, to the fact that, despite her changing and putting on perfume, he could probably still smell the alcohol. She knew she reeked. She tightened her grip on her mug, and downed it. Add to the guilt she already felt. She wiped her lips,

then started fidgeting with her hands. She didn't want to talk.

Danny must've seen it too. She knew what he wanted to talk about, knew that he wanted to discuss what exactly was in her backpack.

But then he did something she never thought he'd do.

He let her go.

He grabbed his car keys from the counter. "C'mon," he muttered. "Grab the thermos."

She blinked. "Why?"

"You know why. Grab it and let's go."

She hated Danny.

With a passion.

She's pretty he flushed the shit down the toilet. She's also pretty sure he dumped everything down the sink and was now proceeding to call every police officer in Madison to keep an eye on her. She had to wonder if they were getting tired of this, of Danny playing helicopter parent while her Dad was away. Shouldn't this be considered child abuse or something?

"Hey Mals."

Sasha plopped down next to her. She was cute, Mallory had to admit. She had a little bob, pixie haircut that made her look like some stereotypical anime character, complete with light blue hair dye and everything. Her smoky eye was on point though. She scooted close to the girl, and grabbed some of her fries. "I know that look," she murmured. "Danny again?"

Unwittingly, Mallory nodded.

Sasha shrugged. "What happened this time?"

"He found it."

Immediately, the Asian girl swirled to her, eyes wide with panic. “Wait. Are you serious?!”

“Serious.”

“Mallory-!”

“Look, I kept warning Ben he was looking. The twink’s been gnawing at the seams trying to get rid of me. And now he’s got an excuse.”

“...Did he…did you snitch?”

“What? No! Of course not!” Mallory forced a fry into her mouth. It tasted bitter in her mouth. “He thinks Ben’s involved, but that’s about it.”

She groaned. “So it’s gone? All of it? Dammit, Dick’s gonna be pissed.”

Mallory examined the empty space in front of her. She took a deep breath. “He found my painting though.”

“The one you did last week?” she asked, as she started shoveling her fries down her throat. “Did he get prissy again?”

“...No,” Mallory said. “He uh…he said it was okay.”

“Okay? *Okay?* You nearly beat out that dude from New York. Some kind of bougie, upper class asshole. You did more than just *okay.”*

Mallory dropped her head to her arms. Truth be told, she didn’t understand it, Danny’s distaste for the divine feminine. He was gay, so she figured *he* of all people should understand what it’s like to be pushed aside, treated like shit. This was *helping* her. Shouldn’t he see that? If he really cared about her he wouldn’t even make a fuss. He would’ve supported her, at least. Dad did. Danielle, yeah. But Danny? They all had to be careful around him.

She’s had theories about this. She figured it was because he was a misogynistic piece of shit. But that didn’t explain why he treated Danielle so differently. She thought maybe it was because he was just one of those conservative hypocrites who thought everyone else was

in the wrong but him. But no. It really was just…this. And despite all the shit she puts up with, it's really irritating.

Then again she was adopted. She was an outsider. She figured Danny would've understood that, at least. Maybe it's because of that. She didn't understand it, but she was grasping for straws here.

"Are you gonna meet Ben today?" Sasha asked, dragging Mallory out of her thoughts. "No," she answered. "No um…he threw away my supplies too, last time I checked."

"Yeah, I kind of figured. Listen, we can replace the altar and stuff. But we need the crack. According to Ben, anyways."

"...Do we really need it?"

"...What?"

Mallory stiffened. "It's just…I read from a book that we can substitute for stuff. We don't, like, *have* to use it if we don't need to…"

Sasha scoffed. "Please. Ben says we've gotta do the ritual right, and that means the right timing *and* the right ingredients. Besides, don't you *want* to get back at those assholes? I mean, I saw Ericka *flirting* with Josh yesterday…"

And immediately, her bad mood worsened. Ericka. If there was one person she hated more than Danny, it was that bitch. She's made it a habit to bully anyone who existed, much less people who crossed her. She's the queen bee of the school. More than once did she catch a girl crying in the bathroom because of her. More than once did a girl cut herself or overdose on the nurse's prescription meds just because of something she said. Mallory fought the slut once, and the only reason she lost was because her stupid boyfriend was there. To top it off, Danny made her apologize. *In front of everyone.*

She painfully twisted her fingers in her lap. She's fabulous. He probably wished she was half the bitch Ericka was. To hell with both of them.

She took another bite, and swallowed it, the bile rising in her throat.

It took her a while before she realized Sasha asked her something. She turned to her friend. “What?” she asked.

“You’re real scatter-brained huh? I just texted Ben. He said it was okay.”

She blinked.

“Just like that?”

“Yeah,” Sasha replied, as she shoved her phone back in her pocket. “Just like that. In about three days, we’ll be ready.”

She grimaced. “He’s got the spellbook?”

“Duh. Just…make sure you’re there. It…really means a lot to me. To *us.”*

“…I know.”

“I mean, seriously, we’ve got everything. We just…need you to lead us. And if you don’t that’s fine. Just…we just need the support.”

Mallory couldn’t help but smile, just a little bit.

The first time Mallory walked into this shop, she was hesitant.

It was around the time Danny moved in. She didn’t understand why he was there, didn’t understand why Dad couldn’t just find some other person to fuck with, someone *his own age.* And truth be told, Dad lost a little respect in her eyes that night. She made sure to tell him that in rather very creative, colorful words. Danielle was different too. She welcomed him into the family, all suspiciousness aside.

But Mallory didn’t. No one could make her. It became even more unpleasant after Danny tried dictating her beliefs. It got so bad, and Dad even took his side and tried forcing Mallory to hide it. He’s never done that before. In all her time living with him, and then being adopted by him, he’s never taken someone else’s side aside from her home. And to be honest, she felt abandoned.

The night she found this shop she and Danny were fighting. About what, she didn't know. It was probably something stupid, as they were wont to do. She got fed up and left, and Danny didn't chase after her. No one did. She did that sometimes, storming off and trying to cool down. She wandered downtown Madison, muttering angrily under her breath. It wasn't before the sun fell did she realize she had absolutely no idea where she was. Her phone was dead. She was hungry. She was alone and tired. No one seemed to want to give her the time of day either.

Eventually, she stumbled across a small shop nestled between a narrow alleyway. It was warm, well-lit, with a bunch of jars and books on dusty shelves. There was a coffee table near the window, and just beside that was a rather large bookcase. It was filled with oddities and junk she wouldn't have looked at twice. She liked the candles, and they sold tarot decks too. It was one of those New Age stores Danny hated, but personally, she found it inviting. The moment she opened the door, the warm air raced toward her. The faint smell of cinnamon and lavender reached her nostrils, and she took to it like a moth to a flame. For the first time in a long while, she didn't feel angry.

It didn't take long for this tiny place to become a haven. Every time she got mad, or upset, or overwhelmed she'd go here. Just wandering through the store made her ease up a little, gave her some peace from the chaos her emotions would cause. Sometimes she'd buy things. Essential oils, just for her to sniff whenever she felt like she was about to lose her shit, even bracelets because she thought it looked nice. There weren't any religious symbols on it, no pentagrams or triple moons, so it's not like Danny could say anything. True, she did start practicing again. And while she felt guilty, she felt like this was an outlet. She had to do this. It was addictive.

As per usual, when she walked in today, there was no one to greet her at the counter. She set her backpack down, and looked around. The candles were stocked again, as were the herbs. She ran through a list of everything she lost. Rose petals, devil's claw, mugwort, possibly some henbane…she felt herself move. She grabbed a small plastic bag set on the countertop, and started moving through her mental list. There were some fancy, witchy candles she'd been

eyeing. And there was a beautiful opal moon necklace she's been wanting for quite some time. Did she need another cauldron? More incense? Another tarot deck? Who knows?

When she was finished, she walked up to the front of the counter. She pressed the button on the cash register, and immediately the machine opened. Beaming, she grabbed the cash she saved up, and started counting the bills. It was an interesting system. In her opinion, the shopkeepers trusted their customers way too much. But after several months of shopping here, it seemed everyone was trustworthy. Even Mallory knew better than to go against the system.

When she was finished, she gently pushed the drawer back in. She took a good, long look back at the shop she was in. She waved to no one in particular, before grabbing her backpack and shoving her newfound goodies in. She lifted it onto her shoulders, then walked outside.

She had to go home.

Chapter 3

Danny flipped through the pages. His azure eyes scanned the lines, muttering the words and notes that came with it. It wasn't long before he shut the book and placed it back into the bookshelf, before he grabbed another one. Once again, he flipped through it, then turned it over and read the cover. *Sea Magic,* it said. Well, it wasn't that surprising; Dani was applying for a marine biology program after all.

"Daniel?"

He looked up, and saw Vlad standing at the door. Tiny, gray strands escaped from his otherwise neat ponytail. His once pristine dress shirt was now wrinkled, a couple of buttons loosened at the top. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He was swirling a flute of wine in his hand. Gave him the whole mischievous richman vibe and everything. It was so cliche it was funny. Nonetheless, Danny shrugged, then turned back to the book. "Hey," he murmured.

"What're you looking at?" the elder halfa asked, as he walked over to Danny. He leaned against him, pressing his lips against Danny's temple. "Ah, she's bought more."

"She's getting too close."

"It's a far cry from the magic you use," Vlad took the book from Danny's hands and pulled him toward the bed. "It's not like you to sound so bitter."

Danny snorted. When *hasn't* he sounded bitter? Moments like these were few and far in between. No ghostly rebellions trying to dethrone Vlad, no Observers questioning his every move, no witch trying to curse him for the hundredth time in a row. It's amazing Danny's held on so long, what with the grumblings. And now, in just a few minutes, he'll have to go back out there. The meeting's online though, so that's…something. He wouldn't have to face the other covens aside from his own, and he'd be able to discuss matters that were more important than Dianic witches and their discriminatory practices against men. Was it a problem? Yes. Did it have anything to

do with him? Not particularly.

Moreover, there was that book Lina had given him. One month with Vlad, and he couldn't find anything. He's analyzed the book and recognized his handwriting, delved through Misery Vex's books and journals, poured through the archives in the Keep's library but he couldn't find a damn thing. The other witches from the Lake couldn't remember, and he was no closer to getting to an answer. Damnation was hanging over his head, and while his soul wasn't getting any worse, it wasn't getting better either. It was times like this he couldn't help but wonder what would happen if he told them he was immortal. What would happen if Lina knew that he wouldn't join them on the other side. What would happen if they realized that Vlad, the Ghost King, his *familiar,* would be presiding over their torture.

It was humiliating. He knew the others weren't used to a familiar being so…intimate with the coven, even if he was the Heir of Fire. Familiars have always been in the service of witches, and some coexist peacefully with them, however controversial it was But not the Essex. No, that domineering part of their charming personalities were ingrained.

"I'm no closer," Danny heard himself say. "Until we find…something, I'd rather Dani not participate in this. At all."

"What would you have her do? Her being involved with Ms. Sanchez and Father Aaron is compromising enough. The closest she would get to this is by learning from the Wiccans. Nothing more."

Danny didn't answer.

"She's grown Daniel. She has people around her."

Danny smirked. "You say that. You didn't trust Lina the first time around."

Vlad shrugged. "The girl's proven herself. Your coven, on the other hand-"

"I don't blame you."

Vlad stared down at Danny's hand. Danny was well aware of what he was thinking. It seemed everywhere they turned there were enemies. Even though Vlad had an iron grip on his court, it doesn't stop stray entities from trying to take over. It was the same thing with the Essex. They were loyal, that much was true, but more than once did he catch other witches glaring at Vlad. More than once did he have to have Lina come to the mansion, if only to strengthen the wards. That wasn't even taking his parents into consideration.

Shit.

"Little Badger."

He jumped. Danny found himself looking down at dark, oceanic eyes. A fingertip brushed against his cheek, a hollow smile on his face. "Do you want me there?"

"...No. I can deal with them. You just…make sure Dani's okay?"

Vlad gave him a reassuring smile. He pressed his lips against Danny's hands, then stood. He walked away then, leaving Danny alone in the dark.

" *Mija* , are you sure you don't need anything? Your father will be home late."

"I'm good Mom," Paulina answered. She sat at the table, hunched over her computer with a black mug in hand. Her hair was tied up, a small cross rosario dangling from her neck, her amethyst choker right above it. She was wearing her Sayonara Kitty PJ bottoms, a fancy black blouse on top. She shot her mother an encouraging smile. She leaned over and kissed her forehead, before walking away, her pristine, light blue scrubs ready to be soiled again. That's right; she had a late shift tonight. Paulina forgot all about that.

She waved at her mom as she closed the door behind her. She swirled back to her laptop, her reflection staring back at her. Her fingers were pressed against the table. A pile of papers sat just underneath, alongside her cellphone, just in case. It was the first week the hotline started up, and already she's been getting so many calls. She's

grateful for the community's support, but still…

In all honesty, Paulina didn't want to do this. Any other night but now. But as it stands, she had to face them. She took a deep breath, then clicked on the button for the online meeting. Anxiously, she waited.

In that moment 11 faces popped up beside her. She caught sight of her best friend, and gave him the biggest smile he could muster. He returned it, before clearing his expression. All business. That was Danny.

"Is everyone alright?" was the first thing he asked.

Peter answered first. "The other covens are getting restless, but for the most part we're okay. Father Aaron reached out to us in regards to the shelter. Said some of the druids were looking to use it for extra support."

Paulina winced. The shelter was overwhelmed as it is. True, the Department of Justice just approved another grant, but even then she couldn't help but worry about the amount of beds they had. And tomorrow night they'll probably be at full capacity again. "I can attest to that," Paulina stated. "The expansion will be completed next week. But it's just a matter of how long we can hold out."

"It doesn't help that some of the other witches are using it as a war zone either," Christina chimed in. "A heathen was trying to bully one of the women into a relationship. He's no longer allowed on the premises, but one of the nuns said she saw some of his goons around, so…"

"…Got it. Lina, how're the sigils?"

"They're holding up. I checked an hour ago, there were no holes."

"Do you need any support with the hotline?"

"The volunteers I have right now are fine," she answered honestly. "But I'm pretty sure there's gonna be an influx. My guess is in the next three months we'll need another building. Separating the men and the women would be best too. Avoid trauma bonding and all

that." Another situation Paulina had plenty of notes on. "I'm working on getting more staff though. Almost everyone we have is from Elmerton." She smiled tiredly. "Apparently, we're the premier resource for getting sexual assault assistance."

"You should let us go after them."

Danny narrowed his eyes, and Paulina stiffened. She tightened her grip on her mug. The shelter's only been running for a few months, and already they were running on empty. She knew things were bad, but she didn't think they were *this* bad. It's good that the other covens were helping out; as of this point she'd take anything. Legal assistance, medical assistance, social justice warriors, tumblr outcries, anything. But witches fighting amongst themselves wasn't helping. Especially now.

"What?" Danny said icily.

Don't do it. Don't do it.

"You heard me," Ivan grumbled. "Why aren't we going after these fuckers? Why are we letting them get away with this? You know how fucked the justice system is."

"You'd rather damn yourself?"

"Already am. And if it means putting a stop to this, then yeah. They're *assaulting* women and children-"

"You do realize that's not gonna make anything better, right?"

"It'll get these assholes off the streets."

"And then what?" Danny pressed. "What about the people they hurt? What're you gonna do for them? How're we gonna prevent this? Cause believe me, if punishment was all that it took, Lina and I would've done it a long time ago."

At the silence, Danny continued. "I know…it's tough. It calls to us. Angers us when our own is suffering like this. And it's easy to delude ourselves into thinking that this vigilantism works. But it doesn't. Killing assholes didn't work. Cutting dicks off didn't work. In fact the

only thing that did was serve to inspire fear in the masses. Create a breeding ground for even more pain to be had. You all know what I'm talking about."

No one dared say anything. Not even Paulina. Despite every bone in her body objecting to the statement, in the end even she knew Danny was right. Samhain was tough before, and now that the coven was beginning to grasp the damage they've done under Ella, it was all they could to try to move forward and fix things. Regardless, even that took some time. Nearly half the witches right now, including Ivan, thought Danny was weak to have to rely on the Ghost King as he did. But there was no other alternative. And as far as she knew, they weren't ready to die yet. Despite living for hundreds of years, they weren't ready to go. In all honesty, they were like children.

Danny sighed. "Lina, you and Charlotte strengthen the protections. Peter, Ivan and Sarah will do whatever is necessary to maintain the peace. I need you all to work with Father Aaron on this."

Even Peter showed his distaste. Ceremonial magic, especially enochian magic, wasn't something they were particularly fond of. Despite that Paulina couldn't help but be amused; the last time they got together, one of the deacons tried converting Ivan. Ivan responded by proclaiming the creed of the Satanist Temple. It was funny in hindsight; they all shared popcorn while the two went back and forth.

The rest of the meeting was just business. Revenues were good, profits reasonable. They were in the green, and projected to go further. The safe houses were still intact. And as far as everyone else was concerned, it seemed the spirits found in Amity Park and the witches had no malice. No new murders found, no mutiliations necessary, no one screaming, "Burn the witch!" and lighting houses on fire. It was pretty quiet.

But she recognized that look on Danny's face.

He was seething.

Everyone, including him, was itching for bloodshed. It's been so long since they've gone without it. The magic demanded it. And now the

Lake of Fire was no longer available to them, they had to rely on Vlad Masters's good will. As long as they served the Ghost Zone, and protected souls they would've been fine. They weren't powerless, of course, but it was humiliating.

For one thing, ghosts weren't as strong as demons, or even other dead witches. She noticed it when Peter looked both ways before crossing the street. Saw it when Charlotte scolded Sarah about walking alone in the dark. Hot-tempered Ivan was beginning to bite his tongue, started walking away, mysterious bruises circling around his legs and neck. Alexander started looking in the mirror more, fretting over wrinkles and worry lines that should've appeared centuries ago, and Natalie was beginning to limp. Paulina herself was feeling the strain; just the other day her shoulder ached painfully, and she had a hard time breathing. She clutched her chest, reminding her of the bullet that supposedly tore her vital organs to shreds. She kept coughing up blood too whenever she was in the shower.

Mysterious burns kept reappearing and disappearing. She knew some of the witches were starting to have nightmares again. They weren't aging. No, not like Elena or Jeremiah. But there was something going on. Still, she knew everyone was okay. They kept checking in with one another. It was okay. But Danny?

She didn't know.

Truth be told, it'd been a while since she'd spoken to her friend. *Really* talked to him. Ever since he got back from Madison, he's been more...shut off. True, senior year was breathing down their necks. The fact that both Danny and Paulina decided to complete the rest of their coursework online was a testament to their busy schedules. With the shelter and the company, it's a miracle Paulina had any time at all. But she knew he was covering something up. She could tell from the long sleeves he wore, the guarded look on his face, the dark shadows under his eyes. Even Vlad must've known something was up. So it blind-sided her, when she realized how angry he'd been.

It took her a while before she realized the meeting was almost done. One by one, they all logged off, save for her and Danny. They sat in silence for a bit, before he rubbed his temples. "What is it?" he asked.

“No, just…disappointed I guess.”

“What? Were you hoping for a ritual tonight?”

“Some human sacrifices, yeah.”

“Who’s fault was that?”

“Well, we could’ve done… *something,”* Paulina stressed, causing her to smile a little. “A little blood here, some mayhem there, a ‘Praise Satan’ would’ve been nice too.”

He chuckled. “Sorry for disappointing you then.”

She breathed a deep breath, her hands in her lap. “Danny,” she said seriously, “they want to prove themselves to you.”

“…I know.”

“And I don’t blame them. They were helpless before Ella initiated them. They don’t want to feel like that again. And neither do I.”

“I know that,” he answered quietly. “But we have to understand that butchering people isn’t going to save anyone. Samhain should’ve taught us that.”

Her eyes flickered down. She remembered Samhain, how the other spirits latched onto her. How they all cried out. How Danny almost ended the ritual because the coven was itching to tear their souls apart. Physically, no one was hurt. But to have millions upon millions of innocents screaming at you, begging for a reason, trying to drag you into the dark? That was another layer of traumatizing.

That wasn’t even counting her and Danny’s victims.

“They’re immature,” she heard him say, causing her to look up. “They think they can be heroes, now that Ella’s gone. But they need to understand the accountability they have to take, in regards to her actions. Think about it Lina; they were literal gods, brought to a level of humanity.”

“Speaking of which, any luck with the book?”

Sadly, he shook his head. “No. I’ve looked through the library in the Keep and Vlad’s personal notes. All it is is just letters. I’m sure Vlad could find those souls in the Lake, but I don’t think they’d recognize it. Fuck, most of the time they don’t even recognize themselves.”

“…I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. It’s…a project. That’s why we’re going to out of town for a bit.”

Paulina’s eyes widened. “Where to?”

“Aunt Alicia. She’s been practicing for a good while, so I’m hoping I can get some info from her.”

“…Has she dealt with the coven before?”

“I don’t know. But it’s worth a shot.”

Paulina fidgeted in her seat. Then, something occurred to her. “Wait, we?”

“…Yes?”

“So we’re just…going? Like, just like that?”

“Yep.”

“When?”

“This weekend.”

“…”

“…”

“Does Vlad know about this?”

“He does now.”

“Does she even know we’re coming?”

“Yep.”

“Do I have a choice?”

“Not really.”

“Does the coven know?”

“They will,” Danny stated. She heard some grumbling from behind the screen, and moments later, a bottle of wine appeared in his hand. He placed it gingerly in his lap, as he continued. “But I don’t want to give them false hope. You’ve seen what’s going on Lina.”

She tensed. “I do. At the very least we should tell Peter. That should be enough, right?”

“If you think it’s a good idea.”

Satisfied, Paulina nodded, as Danny continued. “See anything suspicious?”

“No. Seems everyone’s following your orders. For now, at least.”

“Ivan thinks I’m a sellout.”

“Well, yeah. But Ivan’s Ivan. Can’t really change much about the man. He’s starting to get on my nerves.”

“You’re not gonna turn him into a toad are you?” Danny joked.

She shot a lazy grin at her friend though, as she sat back in her seat. “No,” she replied, “but you could.”

In Vlad’s opinion, after they came back to Amity Park, everything went to shit.

It started after Samhain. Danny had just led the ritual, forcing open the veil, allowing spirits to travel to and from the human realms. Vlad was overseeing everything, making sure no unwanted entity got through, that the souls that managed to slip past were innocent, blameless even. It was a rather jubilant night for something so macabre. The dead danced with the living. Witches performed their ancestral work and mediumship. Things were going well.

But as time passed, the spirits became restless. The games weren't fun anymoreAnd it wasn't long before one of those innocent souls recognized the Essex.

What began as gentle twilight became engulfed with fury and anger. Ghosts he's never known as violent became horrifying, as the witches struggled to defend themselves. The Essex became targets. Even Paulina was struggling with what power she had. Luckily, Vlad managed to force the ghosts away, and Danny chained them down. That night, the younger man solidified his position as Head, and as Vlad's consort. That night he had the entire coven under his thumb. That night was the last semblance of peace.

The day after Danny started having nightmares. Sometimes, he'd whimper, but most often he'd scream. He'd scream for Dani, and Vlad. Even Mallory when he became particularly violent. And then there was the psychosis.!Danny himself didn't even remember. One minute, he was perfectly fine, and the next he was trying to destroy TVs, cell phones, even mirrors if he saw them. More than once Danny's woken from his trance. More than once he's asked Vlad why there were bandages wrapped around his wrist and fingers. Vlad knew Danny suspected there was something wrong. It was only a matter of time.

But what really caught him off guard was the sleep walking. One night, Vlad woke up and found Danny missing from the bed. He searched the castle, everywhere, until he found his love standing in front of Mallory's bedroom door. He didn't wake up when Vlad tapped him on the shoulder. No, rather he just took his hand and led him back to their bedroom. And from there, he'd lay, until he heard his even breathing, and convinced himself that it was only a one time thing, even though Danny's proven him wrong over and over again.

As Vlad laid there, arms curled around Danny, he examined the young man. He looked peaceful, the first time in a while. He looked helpless, even though Vlad knew he was anything but. Every day, it seemed there was another threat he had to deal with, some Danny knew, others he didn't. He's seen ghosts eyeing Danielle hungrily for her youth, for her power. He's seen creatures that once hid in the very edge of the Ghost Zone suddenly circling the castle, if only to see her. He knew how tempted they were, to steal Danielle for

themselves, to force her to give up her own life, if only to placate their desires. It was a rare thing, halfas. He knew that those monsters hungered for life, and for a delicate thing like Danielle to just come and go as she pleased, while they were trapped there? It was vexing.

Then there was his court of fools. Nathaniel believed in them, but Vlad found it less reassuring every day passed. He didn't see the danger, and frankly, neither did Danny. But Vlad knew of all the gifts they promised her. He knew what they were trying to get her to bargain, and he hated it.

But again, as Danny pointed out, they were in a precarious position. They stood above everyone, and they could lose everything if something happened. One wrong move. That's all it took.

Danielle didn't know anything. How could she? He and Danny practically forced her to go back to the apartment after they got back. Of course, she visited more often, and when she did, Vlad made sure the girl had nothing to worry about. After all, Danny himself hadn't known.

From a distance, he heard a cellphone ring. Danny's phone, he recognized. Probably his sister, or maybe Ms. Sanchez. They were the only ones he knew who would call at this late of an hour.

He stole an uneasy glance at his love. His breathing was even, and he looked okay. But that served to add to the tension; Vlad felt like this was merely a clam before the storm. Nonetheless, he kissed Danny softly, before leaving the bed. He walked to his dresser and picked up the phone. His eyes widened.

Madeline.

He peered over his shoulder. Again, still sleeping. He pressed answer. "Hello?" he asked.

"…Vlad?"

"Who else?"

Where's Danny?"

“Asleep.”

“…Jazz has been trying to get a hold of him.”

“Yes well, he’s been busy,” Vlad said flippantly as he stepped outside the bedroom. He closed the door behind him. “I’ll let him know you called.”

“…”

“Madeline?”

“How is he?”

It was times like these Vlad hated her. Well, both her and Jack. If they were so worried they should’ve just come by. It’s not like they were in Wisconsin anymore. And besides, she knew had returned. This silence has gone on far enough. But that was just like Madeline, to run away from her mistakes. First it was him, then Danny, then… then Mallory…

“I’ll let him know you called,” Vlad said.

”W-wait-“

He hung up.